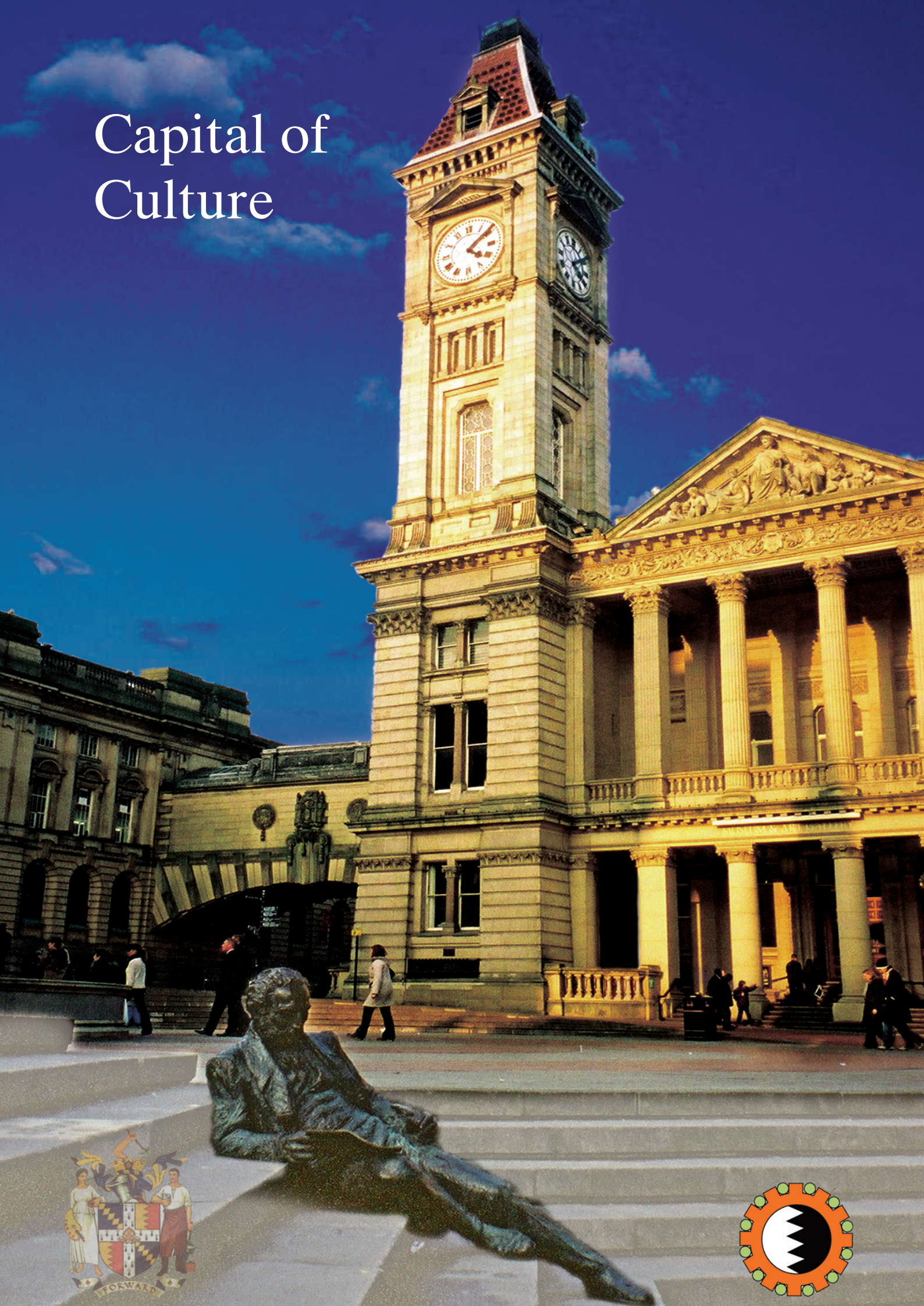


Capital of Culture





Appendix 4: Press Cuttings

A4.1 Selection of Press Cuttings

- A4.1.1 On the following pages are reproduced a selection of press cuttings related to this Scrutiny Review.



Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

Why we came close but not close enough



As the dust settles the time comes for Birmingham to wonder why the Capital of Culture title went to Liverpool. Arts Editor Terry Grimley considers why we lost

As John Major said after the 1997 General Election: "Well, we lost..." But if Sir Jeremy Isaacs is to be believed, we came a lot closer to winning than Major did.

In fact, the chairman of the judging panel said that Birmingham's "cracking bid" came "very, very close" to lifting the title, based on an impressive arts infrastructure and a multicultural population.

So why did we lose? Sir Jeremy indicated three weaknesses in Birmingham's bid – two of them directly, and a third indirectly by identifying the strength of Liverpool's.

1: Birmingham as a region

"How do you sell the city if what you are selling is the region?" – Sir Jeremy Isaacs.

Birmingham's decision to involve the whole West Midlands region in its bid added cultural jewels like Stratford-upon-Avon and Ironbridge, but laid it open to scepticism.

How could you link together events in Stoke-on-Trent and Coventry under a "Be in Birmingham" logo?

The assumption that the regional approach was a good one was made right at the outset, even before the bid team was set up, and possibly not subjected to sufficiently rigorous internal questioning.

It's easy to suspect that getting a big player like the Royal Shakespeare Company on board was just too tempting to resist, but doggedly expanding the net to include the wider West Midlands administrative area stretched credibility.

It did not appear that the city/region tension had been properly thought through.

Nor did it meet with universal approval within the region. I heard recently about a woman who angrily called the bid office from Ironbridge, saying how dare Birmingham include it in its bid and demanding that it be withdrawn immediately.

Perhaps these problems could have been satisfactorily resolved by 2008, had it all been successful.

But the strategy implied a lack of confidence that the city, or its immediate conurbation, had enough to offer – recalling city guidebooks of the 1960s which, after pictures of the brave new inner ring road, quickly moved on to images of Stratford and Warwick.

2: Architecture

"If Birmingham has lacked anything, it is the concept of exciting architecture as a must... if Birmingham had really iconic buildings it would have had a stronger hand of cards" – Sir Jeremy Isaacs.

As someone who has been writing, on-and-off, for nearly 20 years that Birmingham desperately needs to raise its architectural aspirations, it gives me no pleasure at all to see this pigeon come home to roost.

If Birmingham had followed the example of its twin city Frankfurt, which from the early 1980s began to shed its drab postwar image by

commissioning a series of high-profile architectural projects, its case could by now have been unstoppable.

In a sense, the roots of Birmingham's failure could be traced back to the three-two decision taken by a subcommittee of councillors around that time not to entrust the design of the ICC to Richard Rogers.

The power of iconic architecture to transform the image of a city has been stunningly demonstrated by Gateshead, which has been the runaway favourite throughout the bidding process, essentially on the strength of one image of its new waterfront.

Instead of building the iconic equivalent of the Baltic Mill, Birmingham blew £50 million of lottery money on Millennium Point, a large box dreamed up by a committee which has had virtually no impact whatever outside the city and not much inside it.

The city is still too ready to settle for the just OK or the plain third-rate (see, for example, the awful new office block now rising in Colmore Circus).

This is genuinely puzzling, as well as deeply disappointing.

Which part of the sentence "Great cities have great buildings" do you think Birmingham doesn't understand?

3: Popular support

"If one had to say one thing that swung it for Liverpool it would have to be there was a greater sense there that the whole city is involved in the bid and behind the bid" – Sir Jeremy Isaacs.

Liverpool's victory was greeted by the sound of blaring car horns on its streets. It is a safe bet that the same wouldn't have happened in Birmingham, where you would have had to start by explaining to many rush-hour motorists what Capital of Culture was.

Compared to Liverpool, where no casual visitor could fail to see the Capital of Culture material decking the streets and the evening newspaper, the *Echo*, was packed daily with pro-bid material, the Birmingham bid was very slow to raise its public profile.

To be fair, bid director Stephen Hetherington was disarmingly frank in his insistence that the bid was not a public process.

Much of it was an unglamorous exercise in form-filling and box-ticking. Only a few days ago a bid team member was telling me that demonstrating popular support was not one of the bid criteria.

But such a pedantic approach always seemed to fly in the face of common sense. Why should the committee choose a city where there was no perceived "buzz" around its bid?

The failure to run an effective "hearts and minds" campaign within the region was a subject of disagreement even within the bid team. Plans for former *Post* editor Dan Mason, a member of the bid committee, to run such a campaign in parallel with the formal bidding process earlier this year were dropped at the last minute.

The cost of not maximising local support was demonstrated last month, when the BBC ran its live *Battle of the Cities*. The programme itself, crass and shoddy and a discredit to the BBC, is unlikely to have influenced the outcome.

But the same may not be true of the viewers' poll accompanying it, in which Birmingham came third after Newcastle/Gateshead and Liverpool.

As one arts insider put it to me, how was it possible for Birmingham to come third, given the huge disparity in populations?

It was all too easy for observers to draw the conclusion that the Brummie stereotype of apathetic philistines might not be so far wide of the truth, after all.

Conclusion

While the selection of the city most in need of regeneration has led to accusations that this is another case of moving goalposts, the failure of Birmingham's bid highlights some lessons that need to be learned if the city is to move on and prosper.

Perhaps, most importantly, it points to a gap in the city between its cultural establishment (just about enough of us to pack out the Ikon cafe for yesterday's announcement) and the wider public.

The third Highbury Initiative symposium, held two years ago, was meant to address this gap. It still needs to be addressed, urgently.

This links to the architecture issue. Liverpool's bid stepped up in national profile when the Walker Art Gallery held a public display of rival schemes for the so-called Fourth Grace development on the waterfront. By contrast, Birmingham citizens will not be allowed to see or comment on rival designs for sites in Masshouse. In fact, I can't remember the city ever having an exhibition of rival architectural designs for any project.

In Eastside, as elsewhere in the city, the first that most people know about new developments is when a hoarding goes up. The planning process has become even more remote since the planning department moved from Baskerville House (where you could "drop in" on the off-chance of seeing drawings and models) to Alpha Tower.

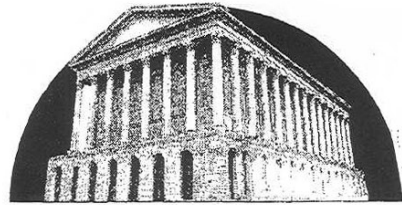
As well as involving and trusting its citizens more, the council should, of course, urgently review its policies with a view to delivering better architecture. But then, I've been saying that for years.

As to Birmingham and its regional context, perhaps the city should have more confidence to go it alone at times. Maybe if it works hard enough on addressing its perceived shortcomings as an aspiring regional capital, it will find fewer of its detractors live just down the road.

B'ham Post 05/06/03



Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid



The
Birmingham Post

Founded by
John Frederick Feeney
1857

Dashed hopes but positive lessons

The time-honoured rules of civilised behaviour demand that we accept defeat with a good grace – and when it comes to bidding for Government favour, Birmingham has had more practice than most.

Once again, Liverpool's selection as European Capital of Culture brings with it suspicions of fudged criteria in a competition which, in this case, was not thought to be about finding the city most in need of regeneration.

But that is beside the point. What is vital now is that we take from the bidding process what positive lessons we can in pressing on with regeneration of our own.

There is much to take pride in. According to Sir Jeremy Isaacs, chairman of the judging committee, Birmingham's strong artistic infrastructure and multiculturalism took us close to winning the prize. But we need to take note of his criticisms as well.

Perhaps the awkwardness of trying to fit a region of five million people into a city-focused bid was not adequately thought through.

And while the need to energise the local population behind the bid may not have been included in the published criteria, there could perhaps have been more awareness that a failure to do so would put us at a disadvantage alongside cities which are traditionally more demonstrative of their civic pride.

These are problems the bid team might conceivably have done something about. However, the third weakness identified by Sir Jeremy is much more historically-rooted. We really cannot succeed in passing ourselves off as a world-class city when so much of our built environment declares our standards to be provincial – can we?

People travel abroad these days and know what constitutes the best, whether in Barcelona, Gateshead or Bilbao. Increasingly they travel specifically to see it.

Yes, we have a few iconic buildings in the pipeline at last, but there is still no clear evidence that the lesson of Gateshead's popular success has been learned. It is still by no means clear that the redevelopment of Eastside will live up to its enormous potential, or the rhetoric.

Hopes for Birmingham were high right up to the last moment yesterday morning, and with good reason. Inevitably many people who shared those hopes will be feeling disappointed today.

But many of the headline projects in the bid, like the CBSO and Birmingham Royal Ballet's collaboration in presenting all Stravinsky's ballets, or MAC's £18 million redevelopment, are still expected to go ahead.

Birmingham, like the other four unsuccessful bidders, will be designated a Centre of Culture in 2008. In the immediate aftermath of yesterday it may sound like a meaningless consolation prize, but it doesn't have to be. Given the will and imagination, it could prove an unprecedented celebration of regional culture, significantly raising the international profiles of all these deserving cities.

Now that the time for competition is over, let's share ideas with our colleagues around the country, and work together to achieve that vision.

B'ham Post 05/06/03



Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

Regional projects were proud to be part of bid



Birmingham's failed bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2008 has been partly blamed on its sweeping emphasis on the region rather than the city. But projects involved across the West Midlands have no regrets, discovers **Richard Warburton**

Birmingham's bid for Capital of Culture status stretched from Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, in the north of the region to the Herefordshire borders in the south. A number of sites, towns and villages in between were included. Billed as a "great festival for the people of the West Midlands", the bid was proud that it included the millions of people living across the region and not just those in Birmingham. Hours after the title was granted to Liverpool, the chairman of the judging panel, Sir Jeremy Isaacs, said Birmingham had come very close to winning - but questioned the wisdom of including so many attractions from across the region.

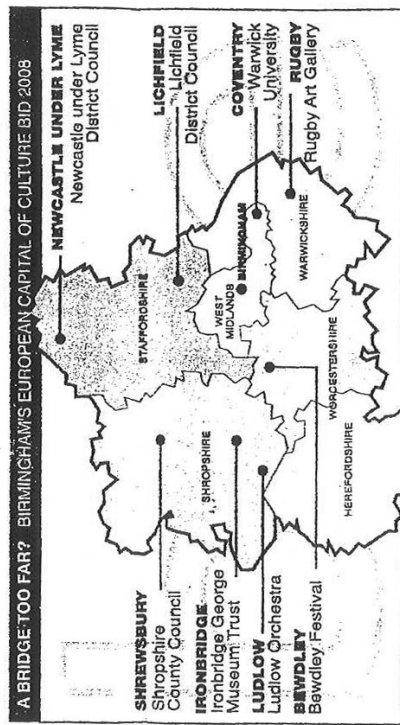
But yesterday organisers of projects backed the bid team's regional strategy. One of the projects furthest from Birmingham was at the Iron Bridge George Museum Trust in the heart of Shropshire for the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and World Heritage Site said: "We were very proud to be associated with the bid. "If nothing else we were able to share a world wide recognition with Birmingham while the bid was under scrutiny. "The Midlands has become the most collective region in the country," Carol Swingle, spokeswoman for

the annual Bewdley Festival in Worcestershire, said all those involved with the festival regretted that it would not now be bigger in 2008. "We have great links with Birmingham and a lot of people come out to visit it. As a people group that they have to visit the city, the bid has grown in recent years as Birmingham has become a more attractive city."

Rugby Art Gallery was celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2008 and Wendy Parry, museums and galleries manager in Rugby, regretted Birmingham's loss. "I don't think it was wrong of Birmingham to have a big regional bid and

the organisers can hold their heads high and say they went for what they thought was the best approach," she said. "Everyone involved in the arts across the West Midlands is disappointed. If we had a massive bid effort, we have had a massive bid effort."

Coun David Smith (Con, Stomally) leader of Lichfield District Council, said he was disappointed by Sir Jeremy Isaacs' attitude. "Birmingham was absolutely right to involve the region in its bid as satellite centres like Lichfield have so much to offer and act as a balance to what goes on within the city," he said.



"The region has so many cultural outlets that put places like Liverpool to shame in their own right and it seems that Sir Jeremy Isaacs and his team have interpreted the rules of the bid after it was entered. It's a damned shame."

Coun Roger Walker (Lab Market Drayton), leader of Shropshire County Council, said the county was going to hold "Celebrate Shropshire 2008" as part of the festival.

Shropshire County Council is obviously disappointed, but we hope the bid area can provide the expansion of cultural activity in the whole region," he said. The Ludlow Orchestra, based in the Shropshire town, were set to play a number of concerts in Birmingham during 2008.

Richard Hornsby, leading member of the orchestra said all the musicians were disappointed. He said: "We feel that we have been deprived of joining in on a year's celebration of culture which would have involved us coming to Birmingham to perform."

Peter Dunn, spokesman for Coventry-based Warwick University, said the Midlands should be proud of the way it had teamed to pull together. The universities in the West Midlands are the Capital of Culture bid together and the Capital of Culture bid for Birmingham proved how good the region has become at working together," he said.

There was only one zone which could not offer *The Post* a verdict. Newcastle under Lyme District Council - more than 50 miles from Birmingham - was unsure which projects would have been undertaken in the countdown to 2008 despite its inclusion on the bid's project list.



Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid



We want reasons – not a scapegoat

Sir Albert Bore's defence of the Capital of Culture bid team is understandable. A witch hunt over Birmingham's failure to win the prestigious title would serve no purpose.

However, the implication of the council leader's statement is that Birmingham, if not quite sweeping the matter under the carpet, is at least content not to try to discover why Liverpool won and it did not.

There is the world of difference between jumping in with all guns blazing, seeking to apportion blame, and a measured and professional inquiry into what went wrong and why.

Some of the comments by Liberal Democrat leader John Hemming can be dismissed as political opportunism. If he thought the bid was secretive and arrogant, why didn't he say so months ago? Perhaps he decided against rocking the boat while the culture judges were still deliberating, although Coun Hemming is not usually noted for his ship-steadying powers.

However, Coun Hemming has a point in that a large amount of public money was committed to the Capital of Culture project and the council should assess whether the bid really did provide value for money.

Secondly, Birmingham's failure to succeed in another prestige campaign, coming on top of the millennium saga and the national stadium fiasco, is worrying.

Brian Woods-Scawen, the chairman of Birmingham's Capital of Culture bid, who is a respected businessman and not a politician, said wisely last week that it was vital to investigate further why success is so elusive. Birmingham, he noted, is not good at self-criticism.

Sir Albert Bore's somewhat prickly response to the call for an inquiry lends credence to Mr Woods-Scawen's view. No one, apart perhaps from those on the fringes of the political process, wants a scapegoat. But those who care about Birmingham deserve to know what went wrong, and whether the next bid for a grand project could be better handled.